

## A Case for Modernizing eRate to Improve Connectivity for Oregon Schools and Libraries

1. 121 of Oregon's school districts are classified as "rural". Of those, 46 districts would be categorized as Frontier (6 or fewer people per square mile) with population densities ranging from .07 to 5.5 people per square mile. See data attached:



Oregon Population  
Density by County and

To provide a little perspective:

*Harney County is the largest county in the state of Oregon at over 10,000 square miles but has a population of only about 7,000 (people, that is – there over 100,000 head of cattle).*

2. Challenges:
  - a. Outdated equipment
  - b. Availability of service
  - c. Cost of service and installation is too high in rural areas. 30% no longer comes close to reducing costs to a reasonable level for districts.
3. Equity of access. In our high poverty and rural areas of the state, access to broadband connectivity is an equity issue. In Oregon, students are taking online assessments. In a school along the I-5 corridor, connectivity is high speed and robust and in another district in rural Oregon someone has to ride a 4 wheeler up the hill to shovel the snow off the satellite dish and keep it off to have marginal speed at best. One test runs fast and the student is able to shift from one screen to another without delay while the other has to wait . . . and wait . . . and wait for a screen to load. Are those students taking the same test? Can you compare scores?
4. Oregon has many school districts that are operating on older frame relay technology. The costs to maintain services has increased 200-300% for these districts. Updating old T1 lines to get to fiber is a restrictive and not effective model. This is a backward priority for rural schools.
5. Many of our smaller districts with 2 or 3 staff have a great need to improve connectivity, but do not have the capacity to complete complicated forms. Small districts don't always know what they need. The eRate application process needs to be simplified. Improve framework, templates and move to multiyear (3-5 year) application.
6. Funding should be prioritized for rural districts and libraries addressing:
  - a. condition of existing equipment

- b. whether the school/library provides vocational education, adult education and the number of open to public hours
- 7. Scalability is an issue. In addition to learning, districts and libraries are using services for VoIP, HVAC systems, data systems and access to learning beyond the local community. Smaller schools (100) students or fewer have greater demands for connectivity to enable students and teachers to access to:
  - a. online learning
  - b. online professional development
  - c. content repositories
  - d. connection to business and industry experts
  - e. higher education
- 8. Reduce constraints on changing vendors within the procurement cycle. Flexibility in deadlines is essential.
- 9. VoIP should be an eligible service to modernize and improve access.
- 10. Vendors should be required to provide service data rather than burdening schools and libraries where there is limited staffing.
- 11. There is a need for service level agreements to meet minimum requirements in eRate. Each district or library should have equitable access to minimum requirements for service and response time.
- 12. The allowable services need to increase to keep pace with increased demand for connectivity. At what point do we need to move from 100MBS to 1G and larger. Larger school districts are needing 10G or more to meet demands.